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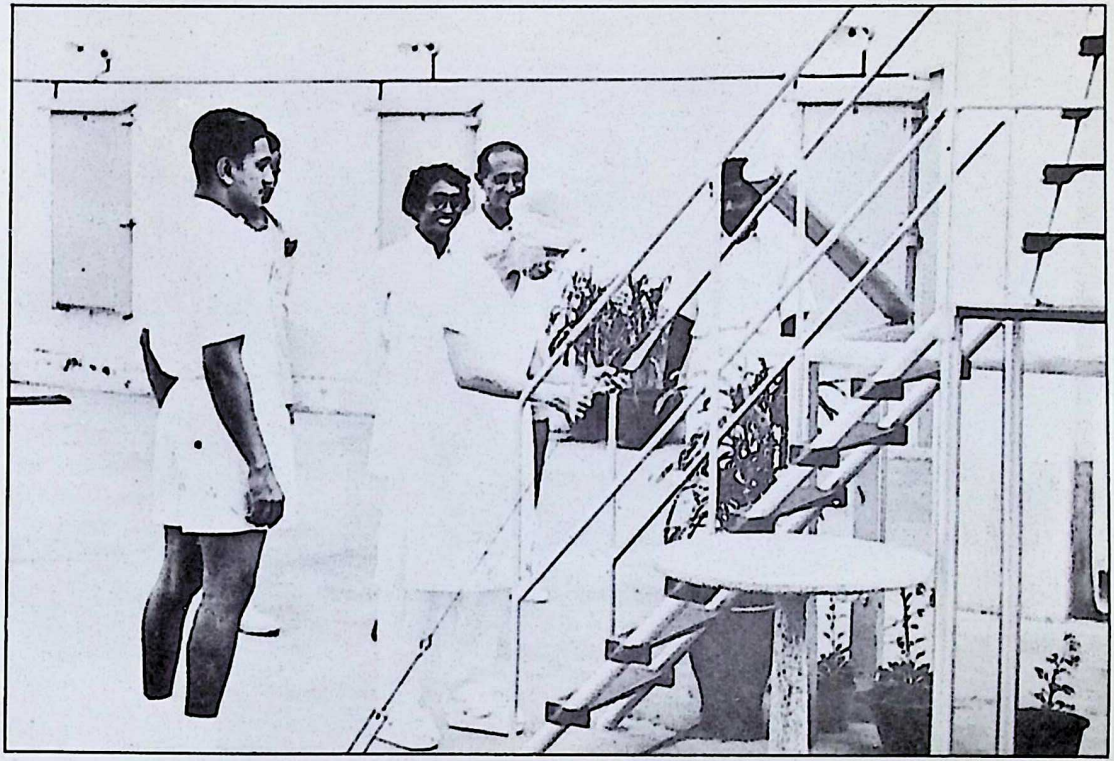
BASIC ASANAS

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

PONDICHERRY, INDIA



The Mother Opening the Asana Section on 21st February, 1953

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Introduction

The practice of Asanas forms part of the very ancient science of Hathayoga and consists of a number of poses which, apart from their yogic or psychological value, promotes health, organic vigour and physical fitness. That this system had stood the test of time to the present day indicates that it possesses some exceptional merit. In his introduction to the "Synthesis of Yoga" Sri Aurobindo says, "The chief processes of Hathayoga are *āsana* and *prānāyāma*. By its numerous Asanas or fixed postures it first cures the body of that restlessness which is a sign of its inability to contain without working them off in action and movement the vital forces poured into it from the universal Life-Ocean, gives to it an extraordinary health, force and suppleness and seeks to liberate it from the habits by which it is subjected to ordinary physical Nature and kept within the narrow bounds of her normal operations.....By various subsidiary but elaborate processes the Hatha-yogin next contrives to keep the body free from all impurities and the nervous system unclogged for those exercises of respiration which are his most important instruments." (S. A. Birth Cent. Library, Vol.20, P-29)

Asanas are divided broadly into two groups—one, the meditative poses, for psychological development and the other for physical health and fitness. In this paper we shall mention these latter type of poses.

It must be explained at the outset that asanas should not be confused with contortionism of boneless acrobatic feats of the circus type. Though asanas of the advanced variety are difficult to perform, the simple poses can be practised by anybody with very beneficial

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results. But it is very important to note that like all other sciences, it should be studied and practised under an expert or else it can be dangerous and result in more harm than good.

In the body, it is the blood which most influences the glands and vital organs and maintains their efficiency by feeding them, repairing worn tissues and by carrying away the waste and toxic products they produce.

In the modern system of physical exercise this is done by the action of the muscles and by giving progressive work to the heart and lungs. But in the system of asanas this is done by adopting such poses that the blood is thereby directed to the particular gland or vital organ where it is required and so improve its efficiency and capacity.

There has long been a controversy as to which is the better system for the body and there is a tendency now-a-days to decry the ancient system of asanas as outmoded and obsolete. But though asanas may not make one very strong physically or build big muscles, they give sound physical health and so condition the body in endurance and resistance to fatigue that they can give a good basis for the practice of all sorts of games, sports and other physical exercises. Moreover their value in corrective and curative exercises is exceptional.

Hence in this age of synthesis, this ancient system should find its places side by side with the modern practice in any national scheme of physical education and it is now being introduced in many progressive institutions as part of physical training, at home and abroad.

Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya

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NOTES

1. In the picture sequences the first and the final poses have been shown; where there are bilateral actions, left side and right side actions have been shown separately. Slowly take the final pose in each Asana and remain relaxed. Never apply force.

2. Try to do the Asanas as correctly as possible, even if you stay in a pose for only a few seconds.

3. Never hold your breath. Breathe normally all the time.

4. Relax for about 15 to 20 seconds between two Asanas. (Savasana)

5. Time may be announced after a certain interval, so that one may know how one is doing and how long it will take to finish.

6. The whole programme will take about one hour to finish.

7. Those interested may contact P. E. D. Office for the cassette in which instructions and timings have been given as in the class, with a musical back ground.

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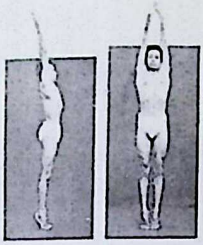
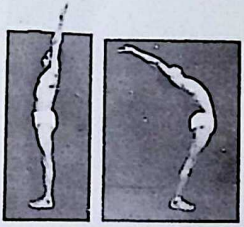


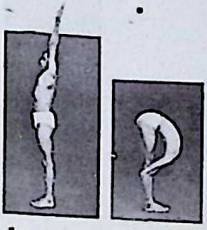
1. **Vrikshasana**—1 minute

Benefits : Stretches the muscles and joints, and prepares the body for the various Asanas. Also improves the general balance of the body.



2. **Ardhachandrasana**—½ m.

Benefits : Perfects the control and balance of the body and gives it a feeling of lightness. Improves spinal flexibility and strengthens the hips. Increases appetite, enhances energy and raises vitality. All muscular athletes should practise this Asana as it enables them to tense and strengthen their abdominal muscles in the stretched condition so that they may not suffer from what is known as "Athletes' abdominal cramps".



3. **Padahastasana**—1 m.

Benefits : Makes the body light, removes fat and

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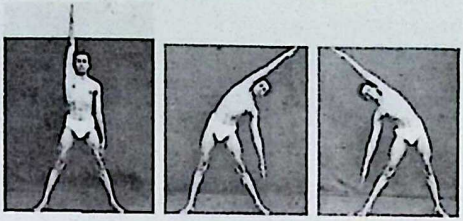
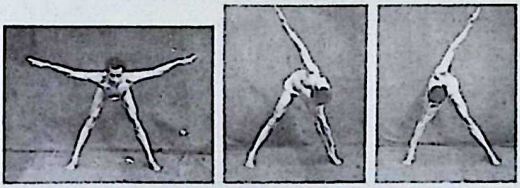
increases digestive power—a very energising exercise. Ensures greater blood supply to the brain to remove fatigue due to excessive brain work.



4. **Trikonasana**—1 m. (each side)

Benefits : Gives a good lateral bending to the spine and helps to keep it flexible and healthy.



5. **Tribhujasana**—1 m. (each side)

Benefits : Gives a good rotational movement to the spine, and vitalises the kidneys.

6. **Utkatasana**—2 m.

Benefits : Strengthens the leg muscles, and makes the body light and brings it under control. A special feature is that the practice of this Asana strengthens the knee joints and ensures a secretion at the knee joints from which the cartillages receive nutrition to keep them mobile.

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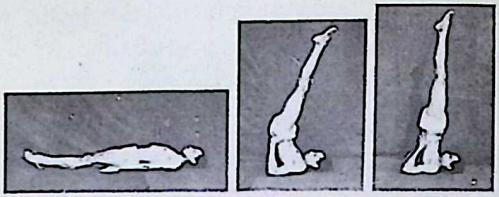
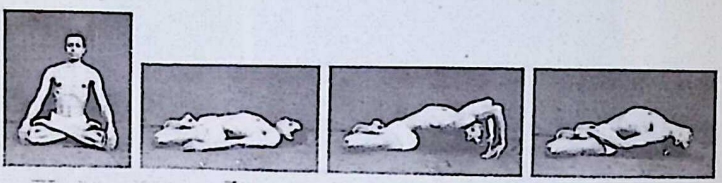


7. **Sarvangasana—2 m.**

Benefits: Promotes healthy secretion of the thyroid —that means healthy functioning of the circulatory, respiratory, eliminatory and genito-urinary systems of the body. It keeps the spine flexible and prevents the bones from early ossification. It supplies large quantities of blood to the spinal roots of the nerves, and thereby gives sufficient nourishment.



8. **Matsyasana—$\frac{1}{2}$ m.**

Benefits: Makes the neck flexible and strong, increases the size of the rib-box, widens the windpipe and thus helps deep breathing. Relieves the neck after Sarvangasana.

9. **Pashchimottanasana—2 m.**

Benefits: Reduces abdominal fat. Removes wind from the intestines and increases appetite.

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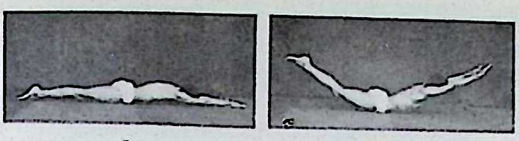
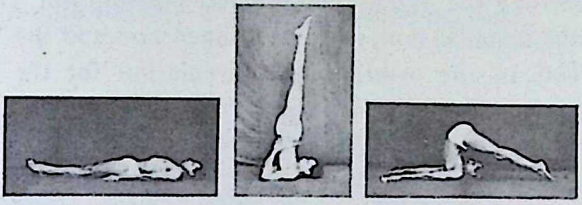


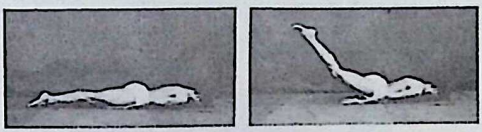
10. **Nauasana**—½ m.

Benefits : Improves appetite. Tones up the muscles of the chest and dissolves abdominal fat.



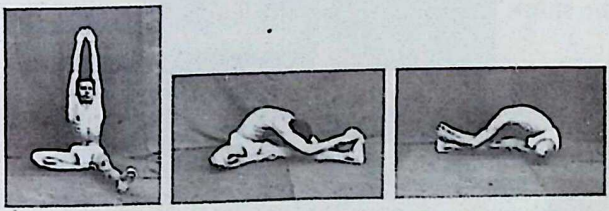
11. **Halasana**—2 m.

Benefits : Makes the spine flexible, creates energy, and the muscles of the back receive an increased supply of blood. It also aids the functioning of the thyroid and thymus glands; hence youthful physical characteristics of the individual are long retained.



12. **Salabhasana**—½ m.

Benefits : Helps to remove all sorts of muscular pains in the lower region of the back. It makes the lumbar vertebrae flexible.



13. **Janushirasana**—2 m. (each side)

Benefits : Increases digestive power. Helps to cure urinary troubles.

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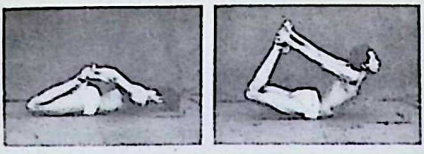


14. **Dhanurasana**—½ m.

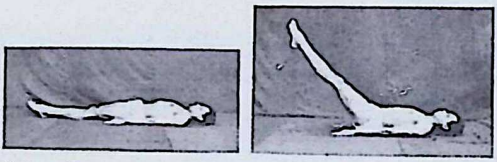
Benefits : Reduces abdominal fat. This pose is very energising, and definitely raises the vitality, because, by compressing the spinal column and pressing the nerves with the scapulae (i.e., with the winged bones at the back attached to the arms), blood circulation for the time being (while in position) is minimised. But at the same time greater blood supply is ensured to those regions when relaxed in the 'Shavasana' posture as advised to be done after each Asana. It makes the spine flexible.

15. **Yogamudra**—2 m.

Benefits : The purification of blood is greatly enhanced by the practice of this Mudra.

16. **Chakrasana**—½ m.

Benefits : Builds a flexible back, stimulates the nerves of the spine. One of the powerful back bending postures.



17. **Utthitapadasana**—1 m.

Benefits : Strengthens the abdominal muscles. Also strengthens legs and helps to cure indigestion.

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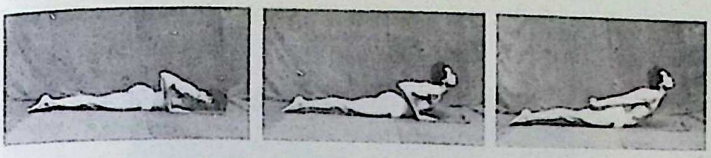
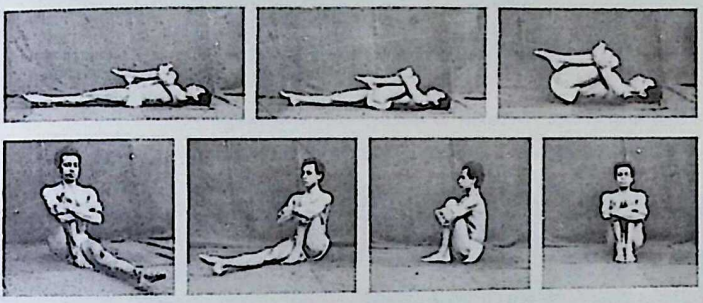


18. **Bhujangasana**—½ m.

Benefits : Helps in keeping the dorsal spine elastic and strong. Backache due to overstrain can be relieved. Helps considerably in reducing abdominal fat.



19. **Pavanamuktasana Series**—½ m. each
(Right, left and both legs—lying and sitting)

Benefits : Removes gas from the abdomen and reduces abdominal fat. Increases the flexibility of the knees and hips.

20. **Bhadrasana**—2 m.

Benefits : Specially recommended for those suffering from urinary disorders. The pelvis, the abdomen and the back get a plentiful supply of blood and are stimulated. It keeps the kidneys, the prostrate and the urinary bladder healthy.

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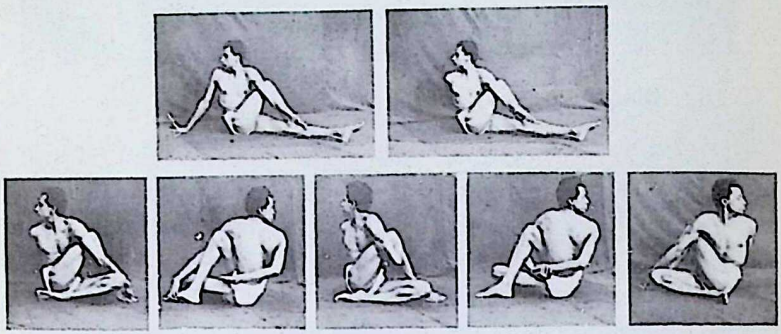
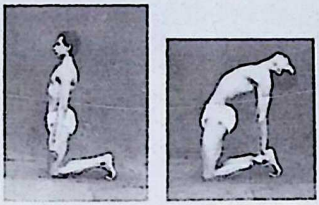


21. **Ardhamatsyendrasana**—2 m. (each side)

Benefits : Increases the elasticity of the spine, and massages the abdomen and internal organs.

22. **Gomukhasana**—2 m. (each side)

Benefits : Helps the proper functioning of the gonad glands. It can be practised to a great advantage just before retiring by those suffering from sleeplessness in which case the timing may be increased upto half an hour on each change. Only once.



23. **Ushtrasana**—$\frac{1}{2}$ m.

Benefits : Makes the spine flexible. Increases blood flow to the brain. Good for back problems.

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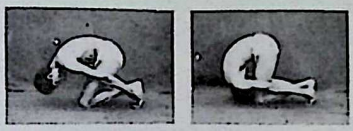
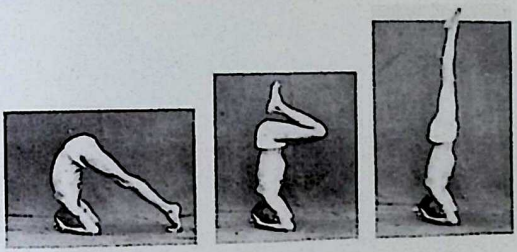
24. **Ardhakurmasana—2 m.**

Benefits : Removes fat in the abdomen and buttocks. Helps to improve digestive power.



25. **Shashakasana—1 m.**

Benefits : Increases digestive power. Helps the functioning of the liver and spleen. Makes the spine flexible.



26. **Shirshasana or Half Shirshasana—2 m.**

Benefits : Gives a rich supply of blood to the brain and a good nourishment. It is a powerful nervine tonic, invigorates, energises and aids the digestive power. Also helps to purify the blood.

27. **Veerasana—2 m.**

Benefits : Aids digestion and helps to cure sciatica.

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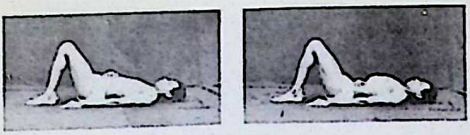
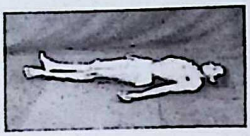


28. **Abdominal breathing**—25 to 30 times
(Breathe in—stomach goes high,
breathe out—stomach goes down)

Benefits: Improves the diaphragmatic, complete breathing. Massages the abdominal organs, improves the peristaltic movements of the intestines thus helping good bowel movement.



29. **Shavasana**—As long as one is comfortable.

Benefits: Makes the muscles soft and pliable and enables the blood to return to its normal flow.

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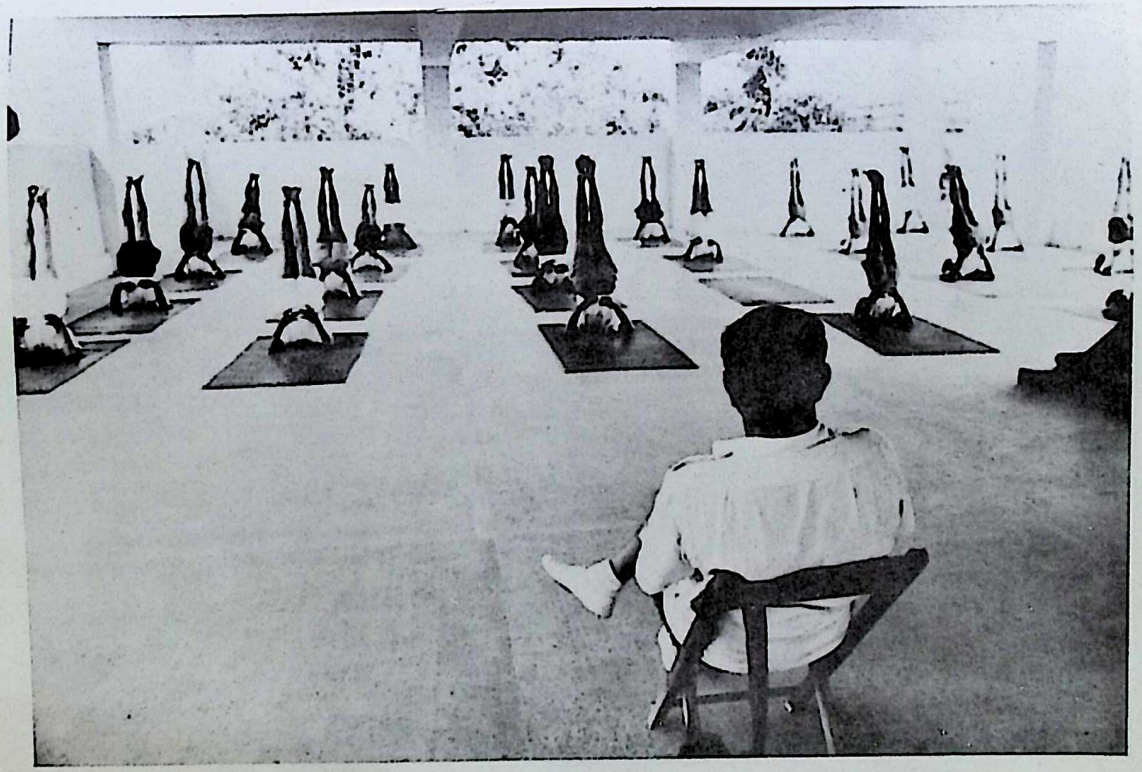

Asana Class in Progress, 1983

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The Hathayogic system of Asana has at its basis two profound ideas which bring with them many effective implications. The first is that of control by physical immobility, the second is that of power by immobility.

...

The first object of the immobility of the Asana is to get rid of the restlessness imposed on the body and to force it to hold the Pranic energy instead of dissipating and squandering it.

...

The experience in the practice of Asana is not that of a cessation and diminution of energy by inertia, but of a great increase, inpouring, circulation of force.

—Sri Aurobindo

*

From our experience we have found that a particular system of exercises cannot be stamped as the only yogic type of exercises and we cannot definitely say that participation in those exercises only will help to gain health because they are Yogic exercises.

Any rational system of exercises suited to one's need and capacity will help the participant to improve in health. Moreover, it is the attitude that is more important. Any well planned and scientifically arranged programme of exercises practised with Yogic attitude will become Yogic exercises and the person practising them will draw full benefit from the point of view of physical health and moral and spiritual uplift.

(Based on The Mother's Talk)